

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act has made our Nation's democratic ideals a reality by ensuring that eligible voters, regardless of language ability, may participate on a fair and equal basis in elections.

Three-quarters of those who are covered by the language assistance provision are native-born United States citizens. The rest are naturalized U.S. citizens.

It is well documented that language assistance is needed and used by voters.

For instance, the U.S. Department of Justice has reported that in one year, registration rates among Spanish- and Filipino-speaking American citizens grew by 21 percent and registration among Vietnamese-speaking American citizens increased over 37 percent after San Diego County started providing language assistance.

In Apache County, Arizona, the Department's enforcement activities have resulted in a 26-percent increase in Native American turnout in 4 years, allowing Navajo Code talkers, veterans, and the elderly to participate in elections for the first time.

This amendment would effectively disenfranchise language minority voters through the appropriation process.

Section 203 has always received bipartisan support from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress and the White House.

Section 203 of the VRA requires that U.S. minority citizens who have been subjected to a history of discrimination be provided language assistance to ensure that they can make informed choices at the polls.

It does not offer voting assistance to illegal or non-naturalized immigrants.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this rule and pass the strong and relevant Voting Rights Act that America needs.

Mr. Speaker, cognizant of the historic nature of what we are doing and strongly supportive of the legislation that we are bringing to the floor today, I yield back the balance of my time and move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill (H.R. 9) to be considered shortly.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

FANNIE LOU HAMER, ROSA PARKS, AND CORETTA SCOTT KING VOTING RIGHTS ACT REAUTHORIZATION AND AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2006

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 910 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on

the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 9.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 9) to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965, with Mr. LAHOOD in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) each will control 45 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of H.R. 9, the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006.

H.R. 9 amends and reauthorizes the Voting Rights Act for an additional 25 years, several provisions of which will expire on August 6, 2007, unless Congress acts to renew them.

I was proud to lead Republican efforts to renew expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act in 1982, and I am pleased to have authored this important legislation to do the same thing a quarter century later.

The Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965 to address our country's ignoble history of racial discrimination and to ensure that the rights enunciated in our Constitution become a practical reality for all.

Since its 1965 enactment, the VRA has been reauthorized in 1970, 1975, 1982, and 1992, each time with strong bipartisan support. The right to vote is fundamental in our system of government, and the importance of voting rights is reflected by the fact that they are protected by five separate amendments to the Constitution, including the 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th amendment.

However, history reveals that certain States and localities have not always been faithful to the rights and protections guaranteed by the Constitution, and some have tried to disenfranchise African American and other minority voters through means ranging from violence and intimidation to subtle changes in voting rules. As a result, many minorities were unable to fully participate in the political process for nearly a century after the end of the Civil War.

The VRA has dramatically reduced these discriminatory practices and transformed our Nation's electoral process and makeup of our Federal, State, and local governments. Since its enactment, the VRA has been instrumental in remedying past injustices by ensuring that States and jurisdictions with a history of discrimination ad-

dress and correct those abuses, and, in some instances, stopping them from happening in the first place.

Section 5 prohibits States with documented histories of racial discrimination in voting from changing election practices and processes without first submitting the changes to the Department of Justice or the District Court for the District of Columbia. Section 5 has helped ensure minority citizens in these covered jurisdictions to have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

As a result of section 5 and other provisions of the Voting Rights Act, minority participation and elections as well as the number of minorities serving in elected positions has increased significantly, and many of our colleagues who are here today are personal embodiments of those changes.

Last summer, I along with Judiciary Committee Ranking Member CONYERS and Congressional Black Caucus Chairman WATT pledged to have the VRA's temporary provisions reauthorized for an additional 25 years. Over the last 7 months, the Judiciary Committee on the Constitution examined the VRA in great detail, focusing on those provisions set to expire in 2007.

In addition to gathering evidence of ongoing discriminatory conduct, the subcommittee examined the impact that two Supreme Court decisions, the *Bossier II* and *Georgia v. Ashcroft* decisions, have had on section 5's ability to protect minorities from discriminatory voting changes particularly in State and congressional redistricting initiatives.

Based upon the committee's record, and let me put the books of the hearings of this committee's record on the table, it is one of the most extensive considerations of any piece of legislation that the United States Congress has dealt with in the 27½ years that I have been honored to serve as a Member of this body. All of this is a part of the record that the Committee on the Constitution headed by Mr. CHABOT of Ohio has assembled to show the need for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act.

H.R. 9 includes language that makes it clear that a voting change motivated by any discriminatory purpose cannot be precleared, and clarifies that the purpose of the preclearance requirements is to protect the ability of minority citizens to elect their preferred candidates of choice. These changes restore section 5 to its original purpose, enabling it to better protect minority voters.

In addition, H.R. 9 reauthorizes section 203 for an additional 25 years, ensuring that legal, taxpaying, language-impaired citizens are assisted in exercising their right to vote. And, in my opinion, this is particularly important in elections where ballot questions are submitted to the voters. The committee record that formed the basis for this legislation demonstrates that, while the VRA has been successful in